CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:

selecting, by a user via a user-input device of a sender, a still image that includes a single array grid of pixels, wherein the still image is not part of an existing character set stored on the sender;

~~creating~~ transforming, by a pixel array generator of the sender, ~~a custom graphical emoticon from~~ the selected still image into a custom graphical emoticon~~, so that the still image is used as the custom graphical emoticon~~;

obtaining a character sequence from the user via the user-input device of the sender;

assigning the character sequence to the custom graphical emoticon, the character sequence representing the custom graphical emoticon, wherein ~~so as to~~ the character sequence acts as a placeholder for the custom graphical emoticon;

obtaining a message from the user via the user-input device of the sender, the message including textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein;

transmitting the message from the sender to a destination via a message-transmission modality of transmission, the transmitted message including the textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein; and

separately from the transmitting of the message, sending the custom graphical emoticon to the destination via a different modality of transmission than the message-transmission modality of transmission.

2. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the obtaining of the character sequence limits the character sequence to have characters less than or equal to seven.

3. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the single array grid of the custom graphical emoticon comprises a pre-determined sized pixel array grid.

4. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission includes text messaging.

5. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising parsing the character sequence into an object name for the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the object name includes a globally unique identifier of the custom graphical emoticon and a location of the custom graphical emoticon in an emoticon object store in the sender.

6. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

receiving a request from the destination for the custom graphical emoticon;

in response to the request, performing the sending of the custom graphical emoticon to the destination.

7. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the custom graphical emoticon comprises a portable network graphics file.

8. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:

parsing the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the custom graphical emoticon in an emoticon object store in the sender; and

storing the identifier and the location in a header of the message that includes the textual content with the emoticon-placeholding character sequence embedded therein.

9. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 8, wherein the identifier and the location comprise at least parts of an object name for the custom graphical emoticon.

10. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 9, wherein the object name is stored in the header of the message.

11. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the different modality of transmission of the sending uses at least one of an object store and an object transport mechanism.

12. **(Previously Presented)** The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission comprises instant messaging.

13. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the message-transmission modality of transmission is limited to the textual content only.

14. (Previously Presented) A method comprising:

receiving a communication by a message receiver, wherein the communication includes a character sequence in a text message, wherein the character sequence is mappable to an array grid of pixels residing outside the communication;

retrieving the array grid of pixels using the character sequence;

replacing the character sequence within the text message in the communication with the array grid of pixels; and

displaying the array grid of pixels and the text message on a screen, the array grid of pixels being displayed within the text message in place of the character sequence.

15. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the communication includes a header storing at least one of an identifier of the array grid of pixels and a location of the array grid of pixels.

16. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the identifier and the location comprise at least part of an object name for the array grid of pixels.

17. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the retrieving further includes mapping to a local storage medium to determine if the array grid of pixels has been previously stored in the local storage medium.

18. (Original) The method as recited in claim 17, wherein the local storage medium comprises a cache of temporary files used by a web browser.

19. (Previously Presented) The method as recited in claim 14, wherein the retrieving further includes:

checking for the array grid of pixels on a local storage medium;

if the array grid of pixels is not located in the local storage medium, then attempting to establish a direct link with a sender of the communication to retrieve the array grid of pixels from a storage medium associated with the sender; and

if a direct link to the sender cannot be established, then retrieving the array grid of pixels through a server between the sender of the communication and the receiver of the communication.

20. (Original) The method as recited in claim 19, wherein the direct link comprises a peer-to-peer connection using one of a transmission control protocol or a user datagram protocol.

21. (Previously Presented) A system comprising:

a means for performing real-time communication between a first computing client and a second computing client;

a means for sending, by a message transmitter, a real-time first communication that includes a character sequence representing graphics data of an emoticon represented by a single array grid of pixels;

a means for sending the graphics data of the emoticon in a second communication, the second communication being separate from the first communication;

a means for mapping the character sequence in the real-time first communication with the graphics data from the second communication.

22. (Original) The system as recited in claim 21, further comprising a means for adapting images of various sizes and formats to a pixel array format of predetermined size for use as the graphics data of emoticons.

23. (Previously Presented) A custom emoticon engine having at least a physical component in a computing device, the custom emoticon engine comprising:

an image selector configured to create a custom graphical emoticon from a still image, wherein the custom graphical emoticon is representable as a single array grid of pixels;

a custom emoticon object store configured to store the custom graphical emoticon;

a character sequence assignor configured to associate a sequence of characters with the custom graphical emoticon, the sequence of characters being input by a user via a user-input device; and

a transmitter configured to send the character sequence embedded in a text message to a destination, wherein the array grid of pixels replaces the character sequence within the text message at the destination as both of the text message and the array grid of pixels are displayed on a screen.

24. (Previously Presented) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, further comprising a user interface wherein a first dialogue is deployed to define custom graphical emoticons and a second dialogue is deployed to create real-time messages to include character sequences associated with the custom graphical emoticons.

25. (Currently Amended) The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, wherein the custom emoticon[[s]] object store is further configured to transfer data of

custom graphical emoticons separately from the text message that includes the character sequence.

26. **(Previously Presented)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 23, further comprising a character sequence parser, wherein the character sequence is parsed into an object name usable as an emoticon identifier and an emoticon locator.

27. **(Currently Amended)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, further comprising a header engine to store object name<u>s</u> in a header of the text message.

28. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object store mechanism.

29. **(Original)** The custom emoticon engine as recited in claim 26, wherein the custom emoticon engine uses an object transport mechanism.

30. (Previously Presented) A computer readable storage medium containing instructions that are executable by a computer to perform actions comprising:

creating a custom graphical emoticon by selecting an image associated with the custom graphical emoticon by a sender;

representing the image as a single array grid of pixels for the custom graphical emoticon;

assigning a character sequence to the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the character sequence is assignable by the sender; and

transmitting a text message by the sender along with the character sequence to a destination to allow for reconstruction of the custom graphical emoticon at the destination, wherein the custom graphical emoticon is substituted within the text message for the character sequence within the text message, and both the text message and the custom graphical emoticon are to be received in the same dialog.

31. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, wherein the character sequence allows real-time mapping to the custom graphical emoticon.

32. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to parse the character sequence into an object name for the custom graphical emoticon, wherein the object name includes an identifier of the custom graphical emoticon and a location of the custom graphical emoticon.

33. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

transmit the character sequence in a real-time first communication; and

transmit data representing the custom graphical emoticon in a second communication, wherein the data is used to reconstruct the custom graphical emoticon in place of the character sequence in the real-time first communication.

34. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to:

parse the character sequence into an identifier and a location of the custom graphical emoticon; and

store the identifier and the location in a header of the message that includes the character sequence.

35. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 30, further comprising instructions to retrieve the custom graphical emoticon.

36. (Previously Presented) The computer readable storage medium as recited in claim 35, further comprising instructions to retrieve the custom graphical emoticon using one of an object store mechanism and an object transport mechanism.

37. (**Currently Amended**) A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

creating, by a pixel array generator, an emoticon pixel set by a sender by selecting a single set of pixels, which is a custom emoticon;

storing the emoticon pixel set in a custom emoticon object store of the sender;

transferring the emoticon pixel set to a destination from the custom emoticon object store of the sender, wherein the transferring comprises establishing a real-time peer-to-peer link between the sender and the destination to retrieve the emoticon pixel set from the custom emoticon object store of the sender;

sending instructions to the destination on how to retrieve the emoticon pixel set;

mapping the character sequence to the emoticon pixel set using a keyboard device;

parsing the character sequence into an object name for the pixel emoticon set, wherein the object name includes both an identifier and a location of the pixel emoticon set;

storing the identifier and the location in a header of a text message;

transmitting, to the destination, the text message by a sender, the text message including the character sequence, which was mapped to the pixel emoticon set, the destination being configured to identify and locate the transferred emoticon pixel set at the destination using the identifier and the location transmitted in the header of the text message, wherein both [[of]] the text message and the emoticon pixel set are displayed on a screen of the destination, the emoticon pixel set being substituted at the destination within the text message for the character sequence mapped to the emoticon

pixel set within the text message, the emoticon pixel set being transferred from the sender to the destination separately from the transmission of the text message from the sender to the destination.

38. **(Currently Amended)** A method for facilitating communication using custom emoticons, the method comprising:

receiving a communication by a message receiver, wherein the communication comprises:

a text message, the text message including a custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence, which is mapped to a custom emoticon pixel set, which is defined as a set of pixels [[a]] residing outside the communication; and

a header storing at least one of an identifier and a location of the custom emoticon pixel set, the identifier and the location comprising at least part of an object name for the custom emoticon pixel set;

determining whether the custom emoticon pixel set is stored in a local storage medium of the message receiver, wherein the determining utilizes the identifier and the location;

in response to the determining, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from the local storage medium of the message receiver;

otherwise, retrieving the custom emoticon pixel set from a storage medium associated with the sender of the communication or with a server, in which the communication did not originate;

displaying the text message in a screen, the custom emoticon pixel set being displayed <u>in the text message</u> instead of and in place of the custom-emoticon-mapped character sequence in the text message.